

Big Oil still calls the shots; For all its bulk and power, industry manages to keep low profile in climate debate

The Toronto Star

November 18, 2021 Thursday

Copyright 2021 Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. All Rights Reserved

Section: OPINION; Pg. A19

Length: 664 words

Byline: Linda Mcquaid Opinion

Body

During the Second World War, no Canadian would have been satisfied to learn that, while the Allies were making progress, their efforts wouldn't be enough to stop Hitler. Any possibility of Hitler winning was unacceptable; accordingly, the Canadian government devoted itself unwaveringly to mobilizing a national war effort against him.

That's because - unlike children's sports - when it comes to war against an evil tyrant, it's not enough just to try hard. Winning matters.

Same with climate change, which poses a very different but also deadly threat, as B.C.'s flooding reminds us. And we're nowhere near the climate chaos currently locked in due to emissions we've already pumped into the air.

And yet, Justin Trudeau is waging a war on climate change that seems half-hearted - perhaps "deeply conflicted" describes it best.

Certainly, there's a huge disconnect between the Trudeau government loudly proclaiming its commitment to emission-reduction even as it quietly provides billions of dollars in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and turns a blind eye to industry plans to greatly expand Canadian production.

This two-faced behaviour has led an international group of environmentalists to lump Canada in with the U.S., U.K., Norway and Australia as five rich nations whose refusal to rein in future fossil fuel production is jeopardizing the world's future.

There can be no heading off a climate catastrophe if we allow the fossil fuel industry to continue to expand production. It is the elephant in the room of the climate crisis - huge, quiet and heavy enough to crush anyone under it in a mudslide.

Yet, for all its bulk and power, the industry manages to keep a low profile in the climate debate. There were 503 industry lobbyists at the Glasgow conference - but they were tucked inside national delegations (including Canada's), where they were largely invisible.

In fact, the industry was calling the shots, as it has for years. The fossil fuel industry is the richest set of corporate interests on earth, and its future depends on blocking climate action.

The industry has \$27 trillion worth of oil, gas and coal deposits in the ground around the world. If these proven reserves were to stay in the ground - as most of them must to avoid climate disaster - the industry would "be writing off \$20 trillion in assets," notes U.S. climate activist Bill McKibben.

So let's be clear: Big Oil has no intention of leaving that oil in the ground.

Big Oil still calls the shots; For all its bulk and power, industry manages to keep low profile in climate debate

On the contrary, the eight major oil and gas producers in Canada have laid out plans to expand their production here in the coming decade - plans that will result in a devastating 25 per cent increase in Canada's annual carbon emissions, according to "Big Oil Reality Check" by Environmental Defence Canada.

Rather than curbing these plans, the Trudeau government is providing the companies nearly \$18 billion in annual subsidies, including \$3.28 billion through direct programs and \$13.47 billion in public financing through Export Development Canada.

But Trudeau keeps the public's gaze away from these subsidies. "Hey, look over here at how low Canada's emissions will go - and not over there, at how we're subsidizing the production of more emissions!"

What makes this tricky performance so insidious is that the emission reductions are only promises (which Canada has so far not kept), while new investment and subsidies are real, and happening at a frightening pace inconsistent with limiting the global temperature rise to the accepted cut-off of 1.5 C.

The Canadian government certainly didn't give subsidies to the enemy during the Second World War.

Yet in today's climate battle, our prime minister is, at best, split in his loyalties, happy to run around dressed as a climate warrior while quietly doling out billions in subsidies to an industry hell-bent on developing every last ounce of climate-destroying oil.

Linda McQuaig is a Toronto-based freelance contributing columnist for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: @LindaMcQuaig

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Journal Code: TTA

Subject: CLIMATE CHANGE (90%); EMISSIONS (90%); WORLD WAR II (90%); CLIMATE ACTION (89%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (89%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (79%); SEVERE WEATHER (76%); ACCIDENTS & DISASTERS (75%); ENVIRONMENTAL ACCIDENTS & DISASTERS (75%); GREENHOUSE GASES (75%); ENVIRONMENTALISM (74%); LOBBYING (72%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (71%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%)

Industry: EMISSIONS (90%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (90%); OIL & GAS INDUSTRY (90%); FOSSIL FUELS (89%); ELECTRIC POWER INDUSTRY (76%)

Person: JUSTIN TRUDEAU (79%)

Geographic: GLASGOW, SCOTLAND (55%); CANADA (94%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: November 18, 2021

Big Oil still calls the shots; For all its bulk and power, industry manages to keep low profile in climate debate

End of Document